Limestone Quarries Endangering GIR sanctuary Lions

349. DR. D. VENKATESHWAR RAO: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether limestone quarries entrap Gir sanctuary; and

(b) if so, the steps taken to protect lions in the sanctuary?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (PROF. SAIFUDDIN SOZ): (a) There have been some reports of limestone quarrying around Gir Sanctuary. However, as reported by the Forest Department of Gujarat, all limestone quarrying adjoining Gir Sanctuary have been stopped.

(b) An area of 1412.12 Sq. Km. of the Gir Forest, which is the habitat of lions, has been afforded protection. Of this, an area of 1153.41 sq. km. has been declared as an intended National Park while the remaining continues to be a sanctuary under the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. The Asiatic Lion is fully protected against hunting and commercial exploitation. Habitat protection and management activities such as habitat improvement, water conservation, wildlife health monitoring etc., are also underaken. As a result of these measures, the population of Asiatic Lions has gradually increased from 177 in 1968 to 304 in 1995.

Declining Population of Tigers in India

350. DR. D. VENKATESWAR RAO: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether population of tigers has decreased in India;

(b) if so, the reasons therefore; and

(c) the steps proposed to save tigers from poachers?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (PROF. SAIFUDDIN SOZ): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The all India Tiger estimation is conducted once in four years in the country. The estimated population of tiger during the last two estimations, has been as under:—

1989 — 4334
1993 — 3750

The 1997 Census is on going in some States and in others, reports are under compilation. The main cause for the decline of tiger population is the recent increase in killing of tigers to meet the demand of illegal international trade of tiger bones and other parts of tiger body. Fragmentation of tiger habitat due to biotic pressure has also contributed to this.

(c) The steps taken and proposed to be taken are indicated in the statement.

Statement

(i) A "Tiger Crisis Cell" has been set up in the Ministry;

(ii) The State Governments have been advised to strengthen vigilance and intensify patrolling;

(iii) Funds are being provided to the State Governments for the eco-development of the areas to reduce the biotic pressure thereon.

(iv) A protocol has been signed with the Government of the Peoples Republic of China to coordinate bilateral efforts to stop illegal activities of poaching of tigers and to endeavour jointly combating of smuggling and the illegal trade of tiger bones and other parts of its body.

(v) A memorandum of understanding has been signed with His Majesty's Govt. Nepal to address wildlife related issues.